

"Beth!" he whispered, "don't put it that way! I'm in earnest now! You told me to go to work. All right, I'll go! Hang it all, I'll cut rags in one of the plants—I'll break in and do anything. Tell me you'll give me six months—a year—to show I'm in earnest!"

"Will you really go to work, Harvey, and be useful and—"

"I'll bust in to-morrow. The shock will nearly kill dad—and it may kill me—but I'll do it!"

"If you will," she said, patting him on the shoulder, "I'll be the best sister in the world all your life. Now, please don't be angry—I mean it! I can't marry you—I can't give you any false hopes, Harvey. If—if you had said this six months ago, I—I—yes, I would have held a place open for you—in my heart. For I do like you. But—I can't say that other thing now. Do you understand?"

"You—you are in love with somebody else?" murmured the big fellow dully.

"No. Am I? No, I'm not. No. Oh, Harvey—how can I know? What is there that tells us those things?"

She gazed earnestly at the big fellow, and her breath came quickly—and he was wise and game enough to realize that she was not seeing him, but was looking at somebody else through and beyond him.

"You don't have to say another word, Bethie," was the manful reply. "I see it's all up with me. Who is the lucky devil?"

"No, I'm not in love," she repeated, as if he had not spoken. "But something tells me it would only take a little thing—some unexpected thing—to do it. Oh, Harvey, I had to tell somebody, and you are the only one close to me that I could tell. It's queer—I thought—I was beginning to think I was immune. I thought it would never come to me. Has it, I wonder?"

"I suppose it's all settled," sighed Harvey, lighting a consoling cigarette.

She laughed mirthlessly.

"Settled! Nothing is settled. Everything is unsettled. Harvey, suppose after you get to work, and become manager of a department, or something, suppose there should be a girl working for you—a stenographer, maybe—and you—you became very fond of her. What would you do? Wouldn't you feel awkward, day after day, with her—taking orders—taking orders from you—and the ugly fact always there that you were paying her salary—"

"Oh, rot! They're doing it every day."

"Yes, you might tell her—you might even marry her," said Elizabeth. "I see. It's different. You are a man. You can do those things."

Suddenly Harvey Bowles gave a low whistle of amazement.

"I say, Bethie, I begin to see what you're driving at! Don't tell me you're thinking of Rouss! Not Rouss, your manager!"

"Rouss? No! Indeed, not!" she shot back.

"Well, thank the Lord for that!" breathed Harvey. "Because I don't like him, Beth. I saw the fellow in the office to-day, talking with Gaston, and I thought—"

Elizabeth Farnum had leaped to her feet. She clutched Harvey by the arm.

"Saw him in your office! Saw Rouss at the Universal offices! With Gaston!"

"Why, yes. Good heavens! Have I blurted something I shouldn't?"

"Oh, no! Besides, we can speak in confidence. I'm—so glad you came. You'll stay a few days, I hope?"

"No," said Harvey ruefully; "I'll go back in the morning. I've got to invest in overalls and a dinner-pail, I suppose."

"Harvey," she said as they parted for the night, "may your dinner-pail ever be full! Really, I'd like to sit up for a long talk with you; but I have a feeling that to-morrow is going to be the biggest day I ever knew—and I'm tired—tired."

THE worst enemy of Samuel Rouss would have been forced to admit, seeing the general manager step briskly into the office next morning, that Mr. Rouss looked decidedly fit. He tossed off a half-hour's routine work with a celerity that amazed his stenographer.

Rouss knew the exact moment when Elizabeth Farnum entered her office. But he did not go in at once. He rather relished the brief interlude—put it off for the sheer pleasure of maintaining the expectation. He put it off so long, indeed, that his bell buzzed—which rather hurt his feelings. But he assuaged this hurt by telling himself that he would soon be on the other end of the buzzer.

"Well, Mr. Rouss, what news?" asked Elizabeth Farnum.

Rouss smiled cryptically.

"The news is, Miss Farnum, that I have this business absolutely in hand. I am prepared to break the back of this strike nonsense—like that—when the time comes."

SHE didn't mean to give her inside information away so soon. She had meant to see how far Rouss would go in the policy of deception she felt sure he was following. But his suave, self-assured manner filled her with indignation, and she let the words come:

"Ah, then, probably Mr. Gaston gave you some excellent advice?"

The spot on Rouss's head that had formerly borne a crop of hair suddenly went crimson. At the name Gaston he winced and his eyes opened. But his poise did not leave him, and he returned, conjuring up a natural manner:

"Ah, then you know? Yes, I had a long, confidential talk with Mr. Gaston. That's the first thing I wanted to see you about. Miss Farnum, you know I have been always loyal to your father's interests—which are yours. You realize how long I have been here, and that the best of my energy has been spent here. When I first heard that you had received a handsome offer for your interests from the Universal people, it hit me hard. I saw myself thrown out, just as I had lifted myself to a good position—and I admit that I was terrified at the idea that you might sell. I was selfish—yes, selfish. I was thinking only of myself. But all that is changed. I've been permitted to see you here, day after day. Little by little your wonderful personality has absorbed that selfishness of mine. And now I am ready for anything—I am ready to sacrifice anything for your sake."

"I see now that you should dispose of your interests—for your own good. The time will never be riper. The labor world is growing more and more disturbed; manufacturing costs are favoring the integration of industries; and if you sell now you get out at the top. Believe me, I want nothing but your success—your happiness. So I did go to Gaston. I took the liberty—without committing you in any way—of showing him how much he needed this business. You should have heard me boost Escutcheon, Miss Farnum! He shied a little at our labor disturbance. I explained to him how trivial it is. The upshot of it is, they are ready to pay that price. It is a fancy figure. And I ask you not to consider me for a moment. It is the way of the world; I shall have to take care of myself. If I can impress the Universal people with my ability, perhaps I shall do well yet. If not, that is not your fault."

She heard him through, irritated, suspicious, uncertain as to his motives. Then she said shortly:

"I shall not sell. You may have meant well, Mr. Rouss, but you wasted your time. I shall not sell."

Rouss bowed his head in agreement. If he had been unprepared for this downright statement, his face did not show it.

"If that is your final word, Miss Farnum," he said suavely, "I have nothing more to say. I have given you my best advice. But if you mean to hold on, I'll go the limit with you. Give me the authority—"

"These are the same old words, Mr. Rouss. I have given you the authority. What have you done toward settling the strike?"

"I have done nothing. I can do nothing. What authority have I, these days? Don't you see, Miss Farnum, what you have done? Don't you see that your employees know how things stand in the



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